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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses how teacher educators can prepare teachers and credential candidates to deal with the issues of pluralism and overarching democratic ideals. It examines the tenets of a multicultural education course in teacher education and discusses how teacher education programs should be shaping multicultural education. In classes at San Diego State University in California, teachers are prepared to be critical thinkers, cultural mediators, student advocates, and change agents who are committed to equal education and a socially just nation and world community. In order to accomplish these goals, five phases of instruction have been developed: (1) establish a sense of community; (2) evaluate personal values, assumptions, and biases; (3) examine mainstream culture; (4) strengthen connections between teachers and culturally diverse communities; and (5) support equity and diversity in the curriculum. (Contains 12 references.) (JDD)

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Passionate Commitment to a Multicultural Society: Coming of Age in Teacher Education

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Passionate Commitment to a Multicultural Society: Coming of Age in Teacher Education

Clearly, multicultural education is coming of age in teacher education. However, teacher educators passionately involved in multicultural education have different views on the most effective methods for training teachers. While some professionals fear the inclusion of multiculturalism in social institutions as being un-American and divisive (Schlesinger, 1992: Ravitch, 1990), others strike out against reform movements like America 2000 as narrow and antidemocratic because of the overemphasis on the individual in a corporate society and the move away from public issues such as social justice and equality (Giroux, 1992). The controversy surrounding multicultural education is reflected in the numerous approaches and philosophies in teacher education programs. Teacher educators play an important role in shaping classrooms that provide an environment which supports cultural diversity in the curricula and schools. This paper will address how teacher educators can prepare teachers and credential candidates to deal with the issues of pluralism and overarching democratic ideals. The paper addresses the following questions:

1. What are the tenets of a multicultural education course in teacher education?
2. As schools of teacher education across the nation develop curricula for the 21st century, how should they be shaping multicultural education in their programs for teachers?

One of the most powerful institutions utilized by society to unify a nation has traditionally been the schools. However, schools have employed an assimilationist orientation geared toward socializing culturally diverse communities into the "mainstream" (Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Giroux, 1992). This paper will present a vision of how schools of teacher education can restructure their multicultural education courses to better address a commitment to a culturally pluralistic society. Multicultural goals transcend any ethnic or cultural group. In the debate over "political correctness" from camps on the right and left, the debate often overlooks the need to bring the "*pluribus*" and "*unum*" together in an interconnected whole of theory and practice. Contributing to the important social institution of schools, teacher

education programs must clearly delineate their values, assumptions, and pedagogy. This paper will present foundations for multicultural teacher education and relate daily curriculum and instructional strategies.

Underlying Values

In creating our classes in teacher education, we believe in a critical pedagogy orientation. Our philosophy stems from the following expectations for teachers:

1) teachers as critical thinkers,
2) teachers as cultural mediators,
3) teachers as student advocates, and
4) teachers as change agents.

We believe that teacher education programs should be committed to preparing both the cognitive and affective development in teachers. Teachers need to be critical thinkers who can challenge current practices and recommend new strategies for a rapidly changing international and national world. As thinkers, teachers must also be strong enough to examine their own values and reflect upon the impact their actions have on children, especially children who come from communities which differ from theirs. They must be able to really examine themselves to see if their actions support the belief in the ability of each child. In addition, teachers who are passionately committed to a multicultural society are willing to work toward changing schools to better meet the needs of all students (Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

Teachers also need to understand their role as cultural mediators. To be most effective, it is crucial for teachers to provide learning environments which are culturally affirming and relevant to the lives of their students. Teachers can bring congruency and continuity from the home to the school context. For teachers to do this, they need to know the local communities they serve and understand the social and family context of their students. As cultural mediators teachers need to provide classrooms which integrate culturally familiar content, materials, and strategies into their instructional programs. In

addition, teachers need to understand there is a culture of schools which many children of color may have little knowledge. This has been described as the "culture of power" by Delpit (1988). Teachers can explain expected behaviors and rules which some students may not know.

Teachers who are passionately committed to their students are also strong advocates for their children. They are continually finding methods in which schools can be more relevant to the lives of their students. These teachers go to school board and community meetings requesting services for their students which may create business internships, support taking field trips, and allow for the purchase of additional instructional materials which their pupils need in their studies.

Finally, teachers are change agents. They work hard to make schools encouraging and effective places of instruction. For example, teachers may write grants which call for the restructuring of their schools so that they shoulder administrative duties which make them part of the decision-making process. Teachers who are change agents are continually reviewing their effectiveness and trying new ways of making schools better places for students.

In our classes we are preparing our teachers to be thinkers, cultural mediators, student advocates, and change-agents, who are committed to equal education and a socially just nation and world community. In order to accomplish these goals we establish five phases of instruction in our teacher education classes.

Phases of Instruction

Establish a Sense of Community

Since multicultural education involves discussion of emotionally laden issues, we begin our classes by establishing a strong sense of community be established in the classroom. For students to participate fully in discussions with each other, students need to feel safe, respected, and comfortable. We also believe that our classrooms should represent a microcosm of the United States where we create a definition of our common

public culture.

In our teacher education classes, we attempt to model the principles of good teaching. Modeling is one of a teacher educator's most powerful strategies; we create a learning atmosphere that says to each student, "You are a precious and worthy person. All of us in the class need your input to grow. Help each other be the best person they can be." We want our teachers to understand that we are all members of one race, the human race, and so we are all interconnected. As in a family, each child and parent are critical members of the community.

One strategy we model in our classrooms which exemplifies the importance of reaching each student is to learn everyone's name. In addition, teachers are often found sitting in a circle facing each other, rather than seated in rows facing the instructor. We believe this arrangement encourages more interaction among teachers and when they learn each other's names, they are more likely to participate in dialogue.

When a safe atmosphere is created, teachers are asked to share their beliefs about personal experiences. One of the activities we use is to ask teachers to talk about a time when they felt discrimination. This discussion often adds to group solidarity because everyone has the opportunity to share a personal, and often painful experience. This kind of intense self-disclosure can help build a common bond among teachers, and also helps them understand there are many types of discrimination. Our teachers often find that most colleagues have felt discrimination. This is a human problem which transcends any cultural group membership. In this way people are building bridges between themselves and others which strengths the atmosphere of community.

In developing a strong sense of community, we are reflecting the words of Maxine Greene, ..."the community many of us hope for now is not to be identified with conformity. As in Whitman's way of saying, it is a community attentive to difference, open to the idea of plurality. Something life-affirming in diversity must be discovered and rediscovered, as what is held in common becomes always more many-faceted-open

and inclusive, drawn to untapped possibility" (p. 17).

Evaluate Personal Values, Assumptions, and Biases

The second phase of instruction is to help teachers to become aware of their own assumptions and biases, particularly those related to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. While it is not possible to familiarize teachers with all of the culture groups in one or two teacher education classes, it is possible to help them become more aware of their own culture, values, and expectations.

We believe in Paulo Freire's idea of "problem-posing education" where social issues are the core of learning. Freire believes true freedom occurs when people think about a problem and come to decisions about what action can be taken. When teachers begin to discuss serious social problems they must examine their own values. The "light bulb" goes on in their minds because they struggle with the social and moral dilemmas which are often intertwined with social problems. We model this assumption by encouraging teachers to talk with each other so that each class reflects a democratic community in which each teacher is an active learner.

We believe teacher education courses must move away from the banking approach to education where instructors make deposits in the minds of our teachers. When this occurs, teachers are passive learners (Freire, 1971). When teachers are passive, Freire believes people learn to accept the status quo of society because the environment of the classroom does not teach people to challenge old practices or create new ways to solve social problems. Students then blindly accept the unfairness of society. Since we believe in problem-posing education, we challenge teachers to rethink their perceptions about cultural and linguistic differences.

We want each teacher to find their "voice" and to express it. Through discussions with each other, teachers have the chance to question what others think and to clarify what they think. This is extremely crucial in a class like multicultural education which is a complex mix of emotions, attitudes, and beliefs about race, class, gender, and other

cultural differences. Discussion is one of the most effective strategies for adult learners who have a need to be self-directed and whose experiences comprise rich resources for learning (Knowles, 1975). Adult learners are impacted more effectively when they are engaged in mutual inquiry rather than in a banking environment.

Examine Mainstream Culture

In addition to becoming aware of their own assumptions and biases, it is very important for future teachers to critically examine various aspects of mainstream culture. Societal institutions such as schools, the mass media, organized religion and government have underlying assumptions and promote a particular set of values. They influence students and teacher at all educational levels. Sexism, racism, classism and homophobia are often institutionalized through organizational policies and procedures, so these types of oppression bear examination.

Dealing with power and oppression issues is very difficult for many teachers for a number of reasons. It is difficult to face the fact that we are privileged by virtue of our gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. It is also very threatening to critically examine the values and actions of U.S. government officials, whether past or present (e.g., a number of founding fathers were slave owners). Furthermore, society benefits from the oppression of others. Land for U.S. society, has often been taken over through the genocide of American Indian communities, and colonization of many other countries affords us a lifestyle which we could not have otherwise. For example, the U.S. imports gold and diamonds from South Africa, coffee from El Salvador, and bananas from Guatemala, and workers who provide these goods live in oppressed economic and political conditions.

Social class issues tend to receive little attention. Teachers become very uncomfortable when discussing homelessness, hunger, starvation, and great wealth. A revisionist history book such as Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States and/or a collection of current newspaper and journal articles on power and oppression can

assist teachers in understanding class privilege, elites, and related issues. When these issues are placed in an historical perspectives, they are often less threatening to teachers. In addition, we attempt to address the relationship between budget priorities and educational expenditures so that teachers can understand that they are very affected by political decisions.

In class, we encourage teachers to examine inequities which are prevalent throughout our society. Women receive approximately 68 percent of what men receive for working at the same job. Native Americans have a life expectancy of around 45 years. African American men are more likely to be found in prison than in college. Understanding power relationships is crucial for teachers who will work with students of these groups, as is understanding the history of oppression of various groups.

Teachers have strong emotional reactions when exploring stressful topics such as sexism, racism, homophobia, poverty and oppression. Teachers must be very conscious of the affective dimensions of multicultural education, and support their students in the difficult process of confronting many painful realities. Allowing everyone in the class to share their reaction to a lecture, video, or reading can provide students with the kind of emotional support needed, and the idea that everyone's views are equally valid and worthy of respect is very important. Teachers can reflect students' anxieties or stress by making such statements as "This is very stressful to think about" or "It's not easy for any of us to stop and think about the pain that many people experience constantly because of poverty or discrimination." Humor also can go a long way in helping teachers deal with very stressful topics, provided it is at no one's expense.

Strengthen Connections between Teachers and Culturally Diverse Communities

In this phase of the class, teachers begin to learn how they are connected to culturally diverse neighborhoods. Teachers often have unfounded fears or misconceptions about communities which are different from them. We ask our teachers, "Do you have stereotypes about other communities? Do you believe Mexican parents

from low-income areas do not care about their kids? And do you believe that parents from Beverly Hills are more concerned about their kids? Where did you get those ideas?"

In order to help teachers review those kinds of beliefs, we encourage various activities. Cultural immersion activities help sensitize teachers to examine their unconscious biases. When they have direct contact with people who are culturally different from themselves, they may become aware of how their own biases. Some teachers have reported how afraid they are in driving to a cultural field trip. This fear reflects their assumptions about the group they are visiting, and teachers are often surprised at just how scared they are of people who are different from themselves.

Teachers are also asked to donate time to a community organization. Often, teachers do not know the importance of becoming involved in their students' neighborhood. Teachers must have more than a surface knowledge of the school neighborhood and the issues which are most important to that community. Most teachers do not live in the same neighborhood where their school is located. In large urban cities, teachers may live in the suburb and commute an hour to their school in the inner city. Yet to teach the children, teachers must know their students. To know their children, teachers need to know their communities.

Teachers often realize that their students come from low-income families, but do not understand how their teacher perceptions of income can poison their thoughts about the abilities and expectations for their students. We find some teachers to feel that poor children deserve less or that it is the student's fault for their lack of academic performance.

Support Equity and Diversity in the Curriculum

In the fifth phase of teacher preparation, we present a multitude of issues about equity in schooling. One of the most important issues in schools today is language. Over 50 language groups may be represented in one school. A first language other than English represents a crucial element of the cultural background of many of our children.

Ethnicity is tied to language (Cheng, 1991; Scarcella, 1990). Though teachers probably cannot speak most of these languages, the teacher can celebrate the first language and help student acquire English. In some instances teachers can assist students in becoming bidialectal.

Some teacher do not appreciate Black English Vernacular (Ebonics). Black English is a systematic and appropriate means of communication which follows established rules and guidelines largely based on West African language patterns (Hale-Benson, 1982). When students are not allowed to speak their primary language at any time in school and by treating other English dialects as inferior, schools perpetuate a class stratification in society. Though all students need to learn standard English if they wish to have an optimal chance at financial success in society, we believe students should not be forced to reject their home language. It is important that teachers reflect upon how the structure of schools often coerce students to become more mainstream, and the implications of this assimilation.

We also encourage teachers to incorporate ethnic content into their curriculum. Teachers are often unsure how to begin because they do not want to make a mistake by talking about someone's culture and offend a student. We suggest that they use literature because not only is it motivating, fun, and interesting, but also well written books are windows into the lives of others. Some of the books we read are The Knight Who Was Afraid of the Dark, Honey, I Love, The Children We Remember, and Teammates. These books present stories dealing with racism and sexism and are excellent materials to be included in issues-centered lessons. Teachers are encouraged to develop issues-centered units focusing on sexism, racism, and classism in their own classrooms (Evans & Pang, 1992).

Problem-posing or issues-centered teaching is one of the most effective ways teachers can help their students examine social issues and let them come to their own conclusions. Students can learn how to phrase questions which bring focus to a problem.

Older students can examine the civil rights movement by with the question like "Are there times when people should challenge their government?" Students may look at the rise of hate crimes by answering "Should states have the right to give harsher punishment to people who intentionally choose a victim because of race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation?" Younger children can struggle with the question of "What is fairness?" Whether students are in elementary or senior high school, we believe teachers can create learning environments where students engage in critical thinking rather than become depositories of information.

Conclusion

We hope teacher educators are passionately committed to a democratic and pluralistic nation. All children must be celebrated and provided with equal education. We can model a community of learners in our own teacher education classes where teachers are seen as:

critical thinkers,

cultural mediators,

student advocates, and

change agents.

We believe that "*e pluribus unum*," can be a reality in teacher education programs and in our nation.

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